

# San Francisco Chronicle

## CHOW DOWN



## BAR BITES

**Bank Bar & Cafe:** "Unwind," reads a message spotlighted on the entry wall of Bank, the bistro-bar tucked off the lobby in Napa's Westin Verasa. That gimmick, plus the color-coordinated bar and furniture, sleek stone columns, jazz and bartender in classic black vest and black shirt, might suggest a cookie-cutter corporate operation for the plush hotel that opened next door to Oxbow Public Market in 2008.

But take a gander at the menu from chef Ken Frank, who also runs the hotel's renowned La Toque restaurant just down the hall. You'll find ahi lollipops with shiso-avocado mousse and ponzu (\$15) plus soy-glazed pork belly and gingered Brussels sprout slaw (\$12).



Photos by Susana Bates / Special to The Chronicle

Assistant manager Curt Steiner prepares a cocktail named the Graduate at the Bank Bar & Cafe in Napa. Goodies include soy-glazed pork belly with gingered Brussels sprouts slaw, top; a duck burger with foie gras; and a half bottle of Opus One.



**The vibe:** The airy space feels extra-airy when it's nearly empty. That means quick service on cocktails like the Graduate (\$12), with cucumber vodka, Pimm's, ginger beer and lime.

**The crowd:** Smatterings of what look to be road warriors drinking Manhattans (\$11) perch alongside a few adventurous tourist types sipping Nolet Umami martinis (\$14) accented with smoked paprika.

**Best seat:** The edge of the bar near French doors leading to the patio gives views of the outdoor fire and fountain.

**Killer app:** The Bank cheeseburger (\$14) features local Long Meadow Ranch grass-fed beef, but for something over the top, a duck burger gussied up with seared foie gras and caramelized onion chutney (\$24) is pure Napa.

**Signature drink:** Some wines on the menu might be why it's called Bank — a half bottle of 2005 Opus One red goes for \$135; a 2000 Dom Perignon Champagne is \$410. Try a more modest choice like the 2009 Von Holt Russian River Pinot Noir (\$12/glass). Diners can also order from La Toque's wine list.

**Also on tap:** Power drinkers will like the extensive choices in whiskey, rye, cognac and specialties like the Pappy Van Winkle 23-year-old bourbon (\$65/glass).

**Bonus:** The "Unwind" message actually refers to Bank's nightly complimentary tastings with local vintners, offered from 5 to 7 p.m.

— Carey Sweet, food@sfrchronicle.com

Bank Bar & Cafe: 1314 McKinstry St., Napa. (707) 257-5157. [www.la-toque.com/bankbar.html](http://www.la-toque.com/bankbar.html). 7 a.m.-11 p.m. daily. Credit cards accepted.